

Message Text

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SUBJ: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. THE PROBLEMS OF CONTEMPORARY COLOMBIA REMAINED VERY MUCH IN VIEW DURING THEPAST WEEK. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE NO CRITICAL DEVELOPMENTS, EVENTS IN BOGOTA AND ELSEWHERE PROVIDED AMPLE PROOF OF THE SCOPE AND PERSISTENCE OF THE DIFFICULTIES FACING PRES LOPEZ. STRIKING BANK WORKERS PROVIDED ANOTHER DEMONSTRATION OF THE PRESSURES GENERATED BY CONTINUING INFLATION AND LOW WAGES. THE KILLING OF TWO SOLDIERS BY GUERRILLAS IN BOLIVAR DEPARTMENT SHOWED THAT THE THREAT OF INSURGENCY, WHILE GREATLY REDUCED IN SCALE, REMAINS TO CONFRONT THE AUTHORITIES. THE CONTINUING INTERPRETATIONS - AND MISINTERPRETATIONS - IN THE PRESS CONCERNING THE US TRADE BILL SHOWED THE UNCERTAINTY THAT HAS OF LATE BEEN AN ELEMENT IN COLOMBIAN VIEWS OF THE US. PRES LOPEZ IN A LENGTHY INTERVIEW RESTATED HIS DETERMINATION TO DEAL WITH COLOMBIA'S PROBLEMS - ECONOMIC AND OTHERWISE - BUT HE HELD OUT NO HOPE OF EARLY OR EASY SOLUTIONS.

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2. THE BANCO GANADERO EMPLOYEES STRIKE ENTERED ITS THIRD WEEK, JAN 22, WITH THE POSITIONS OF THE EMPLOYEES, MANAGEMENT AND THE GOC, PRINCIPALLY THE MINOFLAB, MARIA ELENA DE CROVO CONTINUING TO POLARIZE. IN CALI JAN 20 THE MIN BROADENED HER ATTACK ON THE

COMMUNIST-LED TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION OF COLOMBIAN WORKERS (CSTC) BY DENOUNCING "UNION GUERRILLA" WARFARE BETWEEN THE VARIOUS LABOR CONFEDERATIONS AND AFFILIATES, WHICH SHE SAID INTERFERED WITH GOC EFFORTS IN BEHALF OF THE WORKING CLASS. THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL RECENT COMMUNIST GAINS IN THE CALI AREA AT THE EXPENSE OF THE DEMOCRATIC LABOR MOVEMENT. SHE REFERRED TO THE DESIRE OF THE GOC FOR LABOR UNITY TO END THE RAIDING OF EXISTING UNIONS BY OTHERS, BUT OBSERVED THAT UNITY COULD NOT BE IMPOSED BY THE GOC. ASKED IF SHE OR THE GOC REGRETTED GRANTING LEGAL STATUS TO THE COMMUNIST-LED TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION OF COLOMBIAN WORKERS (CSTC), SHE REPLIED THAT THE GOVT NEVER EXPECTED SUPPORT FROM THE CONFEDERATION AND THAT ITS ACTIONS WERE PREDICTABLE.

3. THE CSTC FILED CHARGES OF SLANDER AGAINST THE MIN IN THE COLOMBIAN HOUSE OF REPS FOR REMARKS SHE MADE IN MEDELLIN (BOGOTA 370) IN WHICH SHE ACCUSED THE CSTC OF INSTIGATING LABOR AGITATION IN ORDER TO TOPPLE THE LOPEZ GOVT. THE MIN WILL PROBABLY BE CALLED BEFORE THE HOUSE IN JULY TO ANSWER THE COMMUNIST CHARGES.

4. PRES LOPEZ JOINED THE CONFRONTATION ON JAN 20 IN CALI, AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW LIBERAL NEWSPAPER, EL PUEBLO. DURING A SPEECH HE CHALLENGED THE (COMMUNIST) AGITATORS TO CARRY OUT THEIR REVOLUTION NOW, "BECAUSE THE GOVT WILL NOT PERMIT THEM TO CONTINUE CREATING DISTURBANCES IN THE STREETS."

5. STRIKE LEADERS SPLIT DURING MID WEEK, WHEN THE PRES OF THE BANK EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION (ACEB) FORTUNATO GOMZZ, REPORTEDLY ACTING ON ORDERS FROM THE CSTC, ORDERED THE STRIKERS BACK TO WORK SO THAT DISCUSSIONS WITH MIN DE CROVO TO SETTLE THE STRIKE ISSUES COULD BEGIN. SHE HAD ASSERTED THAT DISCUSSIONS COULD NOT BEGIN UNTIL THE STRIKE ENDED. THE INTER-UNION STRIKE COMMITTEE, COMPOSED OF UNIONS OF SEVERAL BANKS, INCLUDING THE GANADERO, WHICH HAD STAGED SYMPATHY WALKOUTS DURING THE LAST FEW DAYS, REJECTED GOMEZ' ORDER, LEADING TO HIS EXPULSION FROM ACEB. GOMEZ, WHO IS A MEMBER OF THE MAOIST INDEPENDENT AND REVOLUTIOARY WORKERS MOVEMENT (MOIR) WAS REPLACED BY MARTHA BURITICA DE HURTADO, WHO IS ALLEGED TO BE AMONG THE MORE MILITANT MOIR MEMBERS. AND
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THUS THE STRIKE CONTINUED.

6. COMMENT: THE MOIR HAD ONLY RECENTLY JOINED THE CSTC RANKS. THE ACTIONS OF THE MILITANTS IN OUSTING GOMEZ INDICATES THAT THE NEW UNITY MAY BE SHORTLIVED. OTHERWISE THE CSTC DOG MAY FIND ITSELF BEING WAGGED BY THE MOIR TAIL.

7. PRESIDENTIAL ECONOMIC VIEWS. IN FAIRLY WIDE RANGING INTERVIEW GRANTED TO NEW LIBERAL NEWSPAPER IN CALI EL PUEBLO, PRES LOPEZ DEFENDED HIS ECONOMIC POLICIES THUS FAR. HE NOTED THAT WHILE THE RATE OF INFLATION ROSE FROM 14 PERCENT TO 22 PERCENT FROM 72 TO 73, AN INCREASE OF 8 POINTS, IT ONLY ROSE ANOTHER 3 POINTS TO 25 PERCENT IN 74, INDICATING THAT THE RAOS OF INCREASE HAS

BEGUN TO DROP. HE PREDICTED MONDERATE PRICE DECLINES WITHIN SIX MONTHS BECAUSE OF SOFTER MARKETS FOR CATTLE, TEXTILES, AND RICE. BUT HE ALSO ACKNOWLEDGED A DANGER OF RISING UNEMPLOYMENT (WITHOUT OFFERING ANY SOLUTIONS). DESPITE GLOOMY PROPHECIES, HE SAID, THE CONSTANT VALUE SAVING AND LOAN SYSTEM WAS STILL THRIVING AFTER HIS GOVT'S MEASURES TO CONTROL IT HAD BECOME EFFECTIVE. WHEN ASKED IF HE WOULD RESIGN IF HIS POLICIES FAILED TO CONTROL INFLATION, HE SAID HE WAS NOT THE TYPE TO THROW IN THE TOWEL AND DEFINITELY WOULD NOT RESIGN.

8. THE PRES ONCE AGAIN DENIED THAT HE HAD RENEGED ON A CAMPAIGN PROMISE TO INSTITUTE A WAGES AND INCOMES POLICY. IT WAS FIRST NECESSARY, HE SAID, TO STABILIZE PRICES BY CONTROLLING MONETARY EXPANSION; THEN AN INCOMES POLICY WOULD FOLLOW, BEGINNING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR (I E GOVT WORKERS CAN LOOK FORWARD TO A PAY INCREASE). HE REJECTED THE IDEA OF IMPORTED INFLATION, STATING RATHER THAT UNSOUND FISCAL POLICIES INCLUDING NUMEROUS SUBSIDY SYSTEMS HAD BEEN MORE INFLATIONARY IN COLOMBIA THAN WORLD PRICE MOVEMENTS. LOPEZ MADE IT CLEAR THAT WHILE HE IS OPPOSED TO EURODOLLAR LOANS FOR BUDGET SUPPORT, HE DIFINITELY EXPECTS TO UTILIZE DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE LOANS. FINALLY HE STRESSED THE NECESITY OF COLOMBIA CONFRONTING PRESENT WORLD EMERGENCY WITH IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY ENDING THE COUNTRY'S RELATIVE ISOLATION.

9. ROJAS PINILLA FUNERAL. GENERAL GUSTAVO ROJAS PINILLA WAS BURIED JAN 19 WITH FULL MIL HONORS. WITH THE FUNERAL, COLOMBIA BID FAREWELL TO THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE IN ITS MODERN HISTORY. ROJAS' PRESIDENCY (JUNE 1953-MAY 1957) WAS THE ONLY COLOMBIAN CONFIDENTIAL

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DICTATORSHIP IN THE PRESENT CENTURY. FOLLOWING HIS REMOVAL, HE WAS TRIED BY THE COLOMBIAN SENATE IN 58 AND SENTENCED TO "NATIONAL INDIGNITY," A PENALTY THAT WAS SHORTLY THEREAFTER REVERSED BY THE SUPREME COURT AS UNCONSTITUTIONAL. THE GEN LATER FORMED HIS OWN POLIT MOVEMENT, THE ALLIANCE OF NATIONAL OPPOSITION (ANAPO), AND IN 70 BARELY LOST HIS BID FOR THE PRESIDENCY TO NATIONAL FRONT CANDIDATE MISAEL PASTRANA. FOLLOWING THE 70 ELECTION, THE INTEGRITY OF WHICH IS STILL QUESTIONED BY MANY COLOMBIANS, THE GEN'S POLIT FOTUNES BEGAN TO DECLINE. AS HIS HEALTH WORSNED HE TURNED OVER LEADERSHIP OF THE MOVEMENT TO HIS DAUGHTER, MARIA EUGENIA ROJAS DE MORENO. THE PARTY, WHICH HAD BEEN ESSENTIALLY APERSONAL VEHICLE FOR THEGEN, BEGAN TO DISINTEGRATE AND IN THE 74 ELECTIONS, WITH MRS MORENO AS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, WON ONLY NINE PERCENT OF THE VOTE. WITH THE GEN'S DEATH IT IS UNLIKELY THAT ANAPO WILL BE ABLE TO REVERSE ITS DECLINE.

10. COMPTROLLER GENERAL FINED. THE ATTORGEN'S OFFICE HAS FINED COMPTROLLER GEN JULIO ENRIQUE ESCALLON 500 PESOS FOR APPLYING FOR A PERSONAL LOAN FROM A BANK IN WHICH THE COMPTROLLERS OFFICE MEAINTAINS ITS ACCOUNT. THIS SLAP ON THE WRIST IS SIGNIFICANT SINCE IT IS THE FIRST DIRECT DISCIPLINARY ACTION TAKEN BY THE

GOC AGAINST ESCALLON, WHO HAS BEEN ACCUSED OVER THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS OF IRREGULAR ACTIVITIES. PRES LOPEZ ANNOUNCED LAST WEEK (BOGOTA 555) THAT THE CONGRESS WOULD BE CALLED INTO AN EXTRAORDINARY SESSION DURING FEB TO CONSIDER LEGISLATION REFORMING THE COMPTROLLERS OFFICE. LOPEZ HAD SAID THAT CONGRESSCNAL ACTION TO NAME A NEW COMPTROLLER COULD WAIT UNTIL THE REGULAR SESSIONS BEGIN IN JULY. THE ACTION AGAINST ESCALLON, HOWEVER, COULD LEAD TO HIS EARLY RESIGNATION, REQUIRING THE CONGRESS TO NAME A SUCCESSOR DURING THE EXTRAORDINARY SESSION.

11. EXPORTS DRAG. THE VALUE OF EXPORTS REGISTRATIONS TUMBLED BY ONE SIXTH IN NOV AND AGAIN IN DEC. PRIVATE SECTOR SPOKESMEN CONTINUE TO DEPLORE GOC'S FAILURE TO IMPLEMENT ALL OF THE EXPORT PROMOTION MEASURES IT HAS ANNOUNCED. THE DIRECTOR OF GOC'S EXPORT PROMOTION FUND, LEONEL TORRES, RESIGNED UNEXPECTEDLY (ACCORDING TO SOME NEWS REPORTS) BECAUSE OF DISAGREEMENTS WITH OTHER OFFICIALS ON EXPORT POLICY. THE MIN OF DEVELOPMENT HOWEVER, TOLD AMB THAT TORRES RESIGNATION WAS DESIGNED TO FREE HIM TO SEEK EXECUTIVE DIRECTORSHIP OF INTER-AMERICAN EXPORT PROMTION
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CENTER (CIPE).

12. REACTION TO TRADE ACT. US TRADE ACT AND LATIN REACTION, INCLUDING OAS ACTIVITY, CONTINUES TO BE PRIME NEWS ITEM. INTERESTINGLY STORIES ORIGINATING LOCALLY ARE MORE MODERATE THAN REPORTS FROM WASHINGTON AND SOME OTHER LATIN COUNTRIES. ASIDE FROM UNTYPICAL BLAST FROM ONE PRIVATE SECTOR SOURCE, MOST COLOMBIAN COMMENT HAS TAKEN BALANCED VIEW. OFFICIALLY THE GOC HAS BEEN QUITE CIRCUMSPECT, MAKING NO PUBLIC JUDGMENTS ON ACT. WHILE COLOMBIA JOINED ECUADOR, PERU AND VENEZUELA IN SIGNING A LETTER TO OAS PERMANENT COUNCIL REQUESTING SPECIAL SESSION TO CONSIDER THE TRADE ACT, ALL ITS OTHER REACTIONS HAVE BEEN SUBDUE.

13. GUERRILLA ACTIVITY.

A COLOMBIAN ARMY PATROL WAS AMBUSHED ON JAN 22 BY THE PRO-CUBAN ARMY OF NATIONAL LIBERATION (ELN) IN SOUTHEAST BOLIVAR DEPT NEAR THE TOWN OF SAN PABLO. THE AMBUSH, ALLEGEDLY CARRIED OUT BY A UNIT UNDER THE COMMAND OF ELN LEADER NICOLAS RODRIGUEZ BAUTISTA OPENED FIRE ON AN ARMY TRUCK IN AN ISOLATED AREA KILLING THE PATROL'S COMMANDING OFFICER AND ONE SOLDIER AND INJURING FOUR OTHER SOLDIERS. THERE WERE NO REPORTED GUERRILLA CASUALTIES. THIS ACTION IS THE FIRST ELN GUERRILLA OFFENSIVE EFFORT AGAINST COLOMBIAN ARMY UNITS IN SOME TIME. ALTHOUGH THE ELN WAS BADLY MAULED SOME 15 MONTHS AGO IN THE ARMY'S "OPERATION ANORI," THIS MOST RECENT ATTACK INDICATES THAT THE GUERRILLAS REMAIN CAPABLE OF CARRYING OFF SUCCESSFUL, IF SOMEWHAT SPORADIC AND ISOLATED ARMED CLASHES WITH GOVT FORCES. VAKY

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